

Red-tailed Greenbul *Criniger calurus* and Chestnut-breasted Nigrofinch *Nigrita bicolor*, new to Bénin

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L'auteur mentionne la découverte de deux espèces nouvelles pour le Bénin. Il s'agit du Bulbul à barbe blanche *Criniger calurus* et de la Nigrette à ventre roux *Nigrita bicolor*, capturés dans des filets japonais et photographiés en février–mars 1999, dans la Forêt de Niaouli.

In comparison with other African countries, research on resident birds has just commenced in Benin and there is still much to discover. The country is situated in the so-called Dahomey Gap, separating the Upper and Lower Guinea–Congo/Ghan forest blocks. In this area only small, scattered forest patches are found. In 1997, the Dutch Embassy in Benin financed a project to protect Niaouli Forest, one of the last semi-deciduous forests in the south of the country.

Niaouli Forest (06° 14'N, 02° 29'E), within the Guinea–Congo/Ghan vegetation zone, is c.115 ha in extent. It consists of two distinct parts: the dry Plateau (90 ha) and the lower lying Bas-fonds (25 ha), where several springs form a small stream. Ornithological surveys were undertaken from 1997 onwards and, in February–March 1999, two new species for Benin were discovered.

On 20 February and 5 March 1999, single Red-tailed Greenbuls *Criniger calurus* were mist-netted on the Plateau and Bas-fonds. In size they were between Little Greenbul *Andropadus rivens* and Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda canicapilla*, and were identified by their dark grey head with grey orbital ring and white-streaked ear-coverts, olive-green upperparts and tail (indicating that the subspecies involved was *verreauxi*), white throat, yellow belly and olive-green flanks. Bill and legs were blue-grey, the eyes red-brown (Fig. 1). Wing lengths 85 mm and 86 mm; weights 24 g and 31 g.

On 6 March, a Chestnut-breasted Nigrofinch *Nigrita bicolor* was trapped in the Bas-fonds. Its

chestnut-coloured face and underparts, and blackish-grey upperparts, blacker on the wings and tail, readily identified it. The bill was black, the eye red-brown and the legs dark brown (Fig. 2). Wing length 59 mm; weight 10 g.

These are the first documented records for both species in Benin. Neither appears on the Dowsett's³ list and they have not been recorded by other ornithologists subsequently working in the south of the country^{1,2}. Both occur in adjacent Togo² and Nigeria⁴.

References

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Figure 1. Red-tailed Greenbul *Criniger calurus*, Niaouli, Bénin, 20 February 1999 (Maarten van den Akker)



Figure 2. Chestnut-breasted Nigrofinch *Nigrita bicolor*, Niaouli, Bénin, 6 March 1999 (Maarten van den Akker)